

Prineville Pre-Rally & Redmond FMCA Convention – A Newbie’s Perspective

Old acquaintances, new friendships. Shared adventures, swapping lies. Stories told, fond memories.

That is what my wife and I came away with after our first Alfa SeeYas Rally. I’m really not much of a social animal. I’m mostly a lone wolf, so I’ve never been much interested in this type of gathering. But my wife is a social animal and I thought that maybe I could bank a few brownie points by taking her to the rally. And because I am always interested in what others have done to improve their rigs, I thought that there might be something in this adventure for me as well. (After all guys... you know it’s always really all about us, isn’t it?)

But, who would have ever thunk it? I met several people there that I liked immediately and came away with new friendships that I never expected to form. And my wife? Well, it turns out she was interested just as much as I was in all of the ways that others have made their coaches more livable.

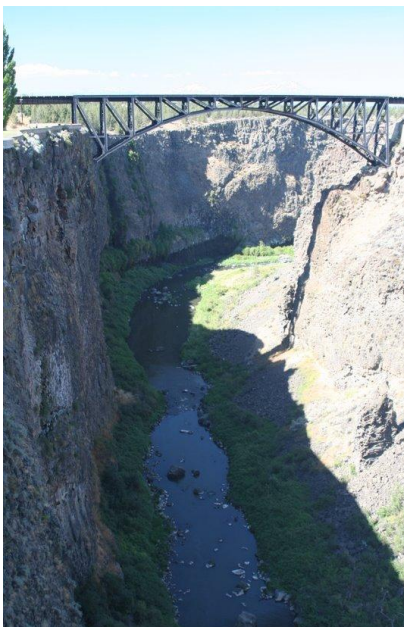
Having the opportunity to meet our wagon master and chapter president and their spouses was a genuine pleasure. One could look long and hard and never find any more pleasant and likable couples than John & Belle Bohn and Don & Patty Rowe. Both the Bohns and the Rows went out of their way to welcome us into the group and make us feel right at home. And more importantly, it was obvious they did this for us, not because that is what they were supposed to do, but because that is who they are. Just good hearts!



embarrassing wagon master appointment.

Now, that said... what kind of idiot chapter president would ever appoint a wagon master who looks like this? It’s more than enough to make me second guess my ability as a judge of character. And what kind of hippy throw back still wears his hair like this? To top it all off... I later learned from the hippy himself that Santana used to play back up to his band. But Santana obviously went on to a much bigger and better future, leaving our wagon master back in the 60s, where he belongs. By the way, our chapter president is the one hiding behind shades... skulking away to distance himself from his

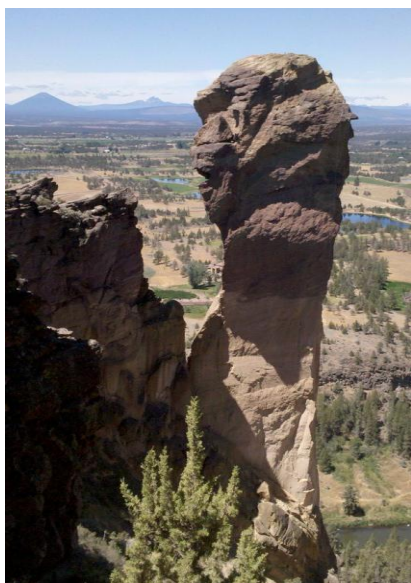
2010 Alfa SeeYas Prineville Pre-Rally



Crooked River Bridge

Having arrived the night before and boondocked at the 300 foot high Crooked River Bridge just 22 miles north of Prineville, my wife and I were the first to arrive at the Crook County RV Park. Wagon Masters Don & Patty Rowe arrived shortly thereafter. Knowing that we were new to the whole rally thing, Don and Patty invited us to park next to them, which we gratefully accepted. They took us under their wings and made sure that we were welcomed into the group. Most gracious of them... and very much appreciated.

The first evening began with a catered BBQ dinner and the grub was almost as good as the company. Good food, good people, good times.



Monkey Face – Smith Rock State Park

A round of golf at the Meadow Lakes Golf Course was planned for the next day or free time for those who aren't golfers. My wife and I took advantage of the free time to ride our motorcycle out to Smith Rock State Park, where we hiked up one side to the Misery Ridge Summit and back down the other side to the river and then followed the river back around to the trail head. We lost a good friend there, who fell to his death a couple of years ago. Our friend was an avid adventurer and thrill seeker, so for me just being there was a way to spiritually reconnect with him. He was well-liked and a great guy who would easily have fit in well with the Alfa SeeYas.



Day three included a Chapter meeting, owner's forum and coach walk. It became quickly obvious that John is not only a respected leader, but also a gracious host. When I grow up, I want to be just like him! And Belle is every bit as likable and sociable as John. A perfect couple.

Helpful information was shared at the owner's forum and useful modifications were shared during the coach walk. All-in-all both events were time very well spent.



See Ya!

Day four was "Getaway Day" when everyone caravanned from Prineville over to Redmond. I've ridden in motorcycle posses many times before, but this was a first motor home posse for me. It quickly became apparent to me that organizing several hundred bikers is a much less daunting task than organizing 22 RVers. John Bohn is pictured at the far right wearing another one of his many hats as our Chief Cat Herder.



Follow the Leader

This is what the ass end of John's coach looked like during the 20 mile and 3 hour drive from Prineville to Redmond. As the saying goes, if you're not the lead sled dog... the view never changes.



The Alfas Have Landed

Pictured here are the coaches queuing up before our entry into the Redmond campsite. The smart money was bet that at least half of us would have gotten lost somewhere in between.



No Casualties

John and Belle Bohn gleaming with pride that all of their little ducklings are now safely back in the nest.



2010 Redmond FMCA Convention

Since there is already a very good article on the convention published in the October 2010 issue of Family Motor Coaching, I will only share with you here some of what I learned that isn't already contained in the FMCA article.



Proud to be an American

The only entertainers that we went to see were "The Texas Tenors," a vocal trio that gained fame during the 2009 season of "America's Got Talent." During their memorable rendition of "God Bless the USA," they brought the crowd to their feet.

Having both enjoyed such great entertainment from the night before; my wife wanted me to join her for the "Tribute to Jimmy Buffett." Not being much of a Jimmy Buffett fan to begin with, I mistakenly told

her that I wouldn't be interested in attending a real Jimmy Buffett concert, much less a tribute to him. Well that was clearly not the best approach. So she responded by asking, "Well, what are we going to do then... sit around the coach all night?" After 40 years of marriage, I should have known that the correct answer to that question was not "yes"... but I couldn't help myself. So she immediately shot back, "All of the other husbands are accompanying their wives and you want me to go by myself?" Once again, I knew the correct answer was clearly not "yes"... and I fortunately managed to somehow stop myself from saying that again. After giving her the answer that she wanted to hear, she said, "OK then... let's go now so we can get good seats." I can't even begin to tell you just how happy that made me.

As I was reluctantly about to board the bus to hell, I miraculously noticed Patty Rowe already on board but not with Don. She was with two other female members whose husbands were also noticeably absent. I saw a chance for freedom and took it. So I asked Patty why Don wasn't with her. She answered that he wasn't particularly interested in watching a Tribute to Jimmy Buffett. Huh, now where did I hear that before? Oh, now I remember! That's exactly what I just told my wife five minutes ago. There was undoubtedly a much better way to say what I said next, but all I could think of was, "See how understanding Don's wife is? And then I invited my wife to join Patty and her friends. Desperate men do desperate things. So she reluctantly relented and to save face said, "All right, but I expect the coach to be clean when I get back!" The thought of strangling her briefly crossed my mind, but there were just too many witnesses and then I would have to kill all of them too.

After the bus pulled away, I went to share my close brush with disaster with the rest of the husbands lucky enough to be left behind. When I told Don how my wife had postured, telling me that the coach had better be cleaned before she came back, he said that I should have shot back, "You'll be lucky if the coach is even here when you get back!" Right at that moment, I counted Don as a friend for life.

And as if it wasn't reward enough that I didn't have to suffer through a Tribute to Jimmy Buffett, my wife returned not even 30 minutes later... sheepishly telling me how badly the Tribute to Jimmy Buffett sucked. She told me that people were leaving in droves, but all of the FMCA service staff were sitting in the front section reserved for them and were hopelessly trapped. She said that there was such a premature and mass exodus that the bus drivers were completely caught off guard and had to call for back up. She also told me that she observed one of the more desperate and creative service staff leave his seat to join a conga line that had formed, so that he could conga away an escape to freedom. So the Tribute to Jimmy Buffett that never was just might be one of the happiest memories of my very first FMCA convention.

Seminar Notes:

I attended most of the seminars that John had recommended in addition to a few others. Here are some of what I thought were the most useful and important topics presented:

Fire Safety:

Do NOT travel with propane tank left open.

Adjust refrigerator temperature as low as possible the night before traveling.

Use refrigerator fan to keep interior cool when propane is off. Use in only refrigerator side – not freezer.

RV fires double in intensity every 20 seconds.

Occupants have 20 seconds to evacuate after fire begins.

Kidde Dual Smoke Detectors recommended, with one in front and one in back.

Escape Window:

Open at least once every 6 months to ensure operating correctly.

Cut wood dowels to proper length to hold emergency window open.

Lay bedding over bottom edge of window trim to protect against abrasions.

Tallest/strongest occupant should exit first to help lower other occupants to ground.

Lubricate window seal to help prevent emergency exit window from sticking to trim.

Hang a window breaker next to emergency window as backup in front and rear of coach.

GeeksOnTour.com:

Tether android cell phones to computer to gain Internet access at <http://junefabrics.com/android/index.php> and download PdaNet software for a one-time \$15.95 charge. This works great! Gain access anywhere cell phone signal is available. Speed is the same as the capability of the tethered cell phone. Verizon has the best coverage, employing EVDO technology (whatever the heck that means?) No more searching for WiFi hot spots or paying exorbitant amounts for access.

Droid favored over iPhone, because Droid has open technology, is based on PC operating system instead of MAC, and Verizon service provider instead of AT&T.

WiFi Hot Spots:

McDonald's

Panera Bread

Starbucks Coffee

Wilson Trucker Cellular Antenna:

Connects directly to cell phones with an external antenna adapter. Up to 90% of cell phone signal on both transmit and receive is absorbed within the vehicle body and the user's head. Wilson solves this problem by channeling all of the power from the cell phone to the outside antenna. This results in the Wilson Cellular Trucker Antenna transmitting and receiving over ten times more signal than a cell phone that is used inside the vehicle without an outside antenna.

Wave RV Antenna:

Improves WiFi reception.

Cummins Engines:

Engine:

Idle not required at start-up.

Once oil pressure is up you can put coach in motion.

Don't operate at highway speed until temperature exceeds 150°.

Shutdown idle required only after full throttle or under heavy load.

3-5 minute idle necessary only immediately after prolonged grade climb.

Storage:

Keep tank full

Buy fuel preferably at high volume stations.

Biodiesel:

Avoid if possible.

5% or less is OK.

Fuel Economy Influences:

Moving speed

Reduce engine speed

Find engine sweet spot

More Power = Less MPG

Engine most efficient at lower RPMs

Use "Mode" button setting as much as possible

Allow engine to lug back when climbing grades

Let automatic transmission make most all shifting decisions

Rolling resistance – Make sure tire pressure is correct

Aerodynamics: 2 X Speed = 8 X Horse Power

Every 10 MPH over 55 MPH costs 1 MPG

Allison Transmission:

Fluid Level Check Procedure:

1. Park on level ground
2. Select "N" & set parking brake
3. Set engine to low idle (1,000 RPMs)
4. Transmission oil temperature 140-220°
5. Vehicle stationary for about 2 minutes
6. Simultaneously press ↑ & ↓ arrows
7. Press display button under "MODE"
8. "OL OK" = Level OK
"LO 01" = Low 1 Quart
"LO 02" = Low 2 Quarts
"HI 01" = High 1 Quart
9. 2nd MODE Press – Oil Life Monitor
10. 3rd MODE Press – Filter Life Monitor
"FM OK – FM LO"
11. 4th MODE Press – Transmission Monitor
"TM OK – TM LO"
12. 5th MODE Press – Diagnostic Trouble
"d#" – Reference User Manual
13. Press MODE & Hold – Clears Display

SilverLeaf Monitor System:

Engine lugging:

It's impossible to lug a diesel engine. When the engine sounds like it is lugging, it's actually operating most efficiently. Ascending grades – Downshifting decreases torque and decreases fuel economy.

Mode button:

Always use Mode button! This results in better fuel economy, even when ascending grades.

Performance mode is the Allison Transmission default setting. It can only be switched by Allison for about a \$400 cost.

Rolling MPG:

Test at various speeds on level ground to determine the engine sweet spot

Cruise Control:

Cruise control overcompensates. Attentive driving will always result in better MPG than running on cruise control. Use cruise control mainly on consistent grades, ascending, descending or level. On varying grades do not use cruise control.

Temperature Gauge:

Engine can run forever at temperatures up to 220°.

Engine can run only five minutes at 226° or higher.

Intake Manifold Temperature:

Better indicator of engine temperature more so than coolant temperature. The coolant temperature only increases when the heat created by the turbo and engine exceeds the heat dissipated through the radiator. Manifold temperature is normally about 35° above ambient outside temperature, but this varies from one engine to another. A 3-5 minute idle before shutdown only necessary when manifold temperature exceeds the normal spread.

Insurance:

Changing primary usage from “driven to work” to “pleasure” will typically save 15%.

Caveat: While I believe the notes taken above are accurate and correct, I am definitely not an expert on any of the subjects reported. Therefore, owners and drivers should first check the owner's operating manuals, before implementing any action based on any of these notes.

Bill's Coach Walk

Here are a few of the modifications that I made to make my coach safer and more user friendly that others seemed to appreciate:



[Air Tabs](#)

Air Tabs are far and away the best modification I have made to my coach so far. They have improved the handling to where I no longer feel any push/pull when passing 18-wheelers or any other big rigs on the road. Plus, handling in serious cross winds is a dream. The manufacturer estimates that Air Tabs provide a 4% fuel savings. While I haven't yet experienced any noticeable difference in fuel economy, the handling improvement is more than well worth the expense. And they are easy to install as well.



[Hydralift USA Hydraulic Motorcycle Lift](#)

There are times and places when all I need with me for transportation is a motorcycle. This lift handles up to 1,000 pounds, with just the touch of a button. The lift can also carry a quad with a different rack. When not in use, the rack folds up toward the rear. Also, a car can still be towed that will move under the rack when making turns. This isn't cheap, but for those who want to take a heavy duty toy along for the ride... this is the perfect way to carry it.



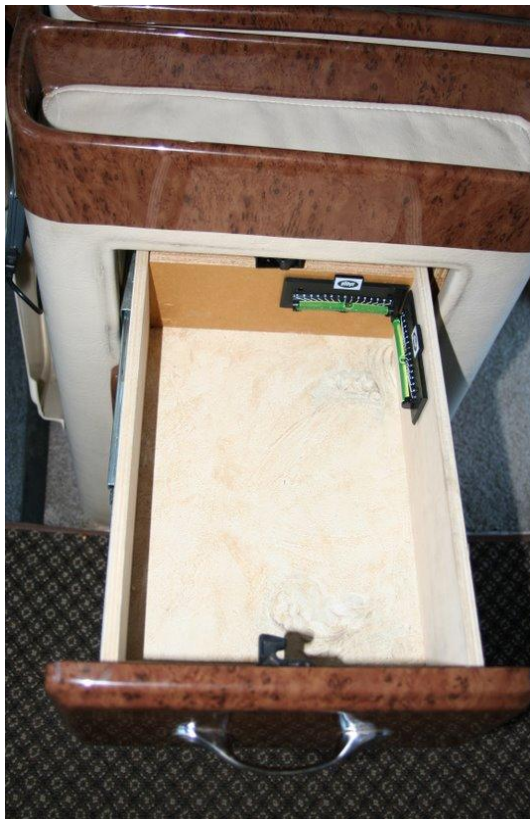
[SilverLeaf Electronics](#)

The SilverLeaf engine performance monitor system can be displayed on the existing monitor connected to the existing computer. The display is completely customizable as to location and types of gauges that you chose. Paying attention to the gauges enables a greater fuel economy. Plus early warning indicators provide notice of potential problems before they are actual problems. In my opinion, well worth the cost.



[Microsoft Streets & Trips GPS](#)

The CoPilot Live GPS that came with my coach was completely worthless. So I downloaded Microsoft's Streets & Trips, which is far more user friendly, and hasn't yet directed me to any places that have never existed, as CoPilot Live had done just one too many times.



[Hoppy Graduated RV Levels](#)

The bubble level installed next to the driver seat only gives a rough approximation of level. So I inevitably would have to keep on checking a torpedo level on the kitchen counter to know if the coach is level or not. Up-down. Up-down. Over and over again, until I installed two graduated bubble levels in the top console drawer. Now I simply stay seated, open the drawer, and level the coach until both bubbles are centered. Perfect every time! Ah, life is good again!



Engine Compartment Fire Extinguisher [Mac The Fire Guy](#)

I found the whole “RV fires double in intensity every 20 seconds” to be more than a little unsettling. Plus hearing than occupants usually have only 20 seconds from ignition to evacuation convinced me that an automatic fire suppressor just makes good sense.

The extinguisher pictured here is bolted to the engine compartment cover. It lowers into place to provide the maximum coverage and it automatically disperses when a high enough temperature is reached. Hopefully that temperature can’t be reached under normal operating conditions. Until that is known for certain, you might want to avoid tailgating any Alfa SeeYas in the Southern Oregon area ☺

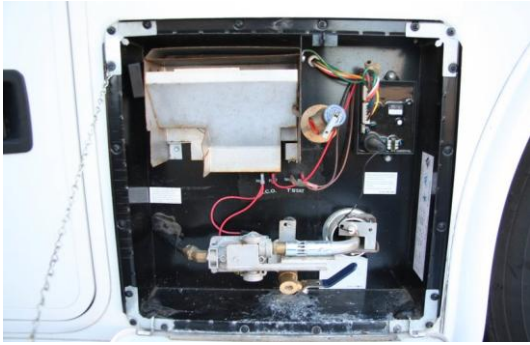


Refrigerator Compartment Fire Extinguisher [Mac The Fire Guy](#)

Besides the engine compartment, the refrigerator is the most likely place that a fire will start in a coach. The fire extinguisher pictured is located to provide the maximum coverage when necessary. There isn’t much space in this compartment, so attaching to the door seemed like the best location. Other locations are possible, but the coverage area would be smaller.



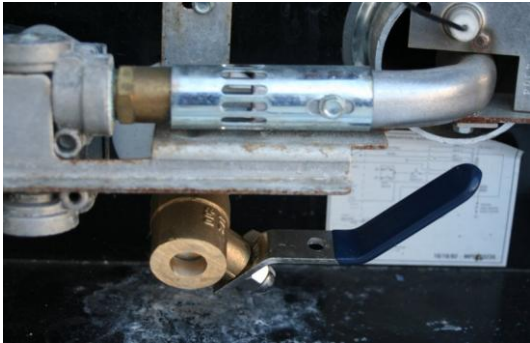
The Fire Safety seminar host recommended cutting wooden posts to the proper length to brace open the emergency exit window. Pictured above is a wooden bracket assembly installed next to the emergency exit window. This keeps the posts in plain sight, so that they are easily seen and accessible in the event of a fire. Also I installed a fire extinguisher close to the window braces as pictured above.



Hot Water Tank Spigot

The hot water tank comes equipped with a plastic drain plug that must be screwed out in order to drain the tank for winterization. The plug is easily cross-threaded and inconvenient to remove and replace. A brass spigot can easily be installed in place of the plastic plug. And with just a quarter turn on the spigot handle the tank is easily drained.

The spigot came with a hose bib end that protruded too far to allow the cover to close, so I took a hacksaw to it. Problem solved.



Battery Fill System

Could there possibly be any more annoying chore than having to fill your coach batteries one-by-one while you kneel on the pavement, and having to contort yourself like a 16-year-old gymnast to reach up inside the front end cover? I think not.

With this system, you connect all three batteries on each side with one filler tube with a quick disconnect end that you connect to a hand pump. The hand pump allows the pumping of distilled water directly from a water jug into all of the batteries simultaneously. When the hand pump can no longer be squeezed, the batteries are full. Voila!



Hydra Hot Filler Tube

The designers sure didn't have owner ease of use in mind when they placed the expansion tank for the Hydra Hot. Installing a filler pump tube with a gallon of 50/50 coolant premix right next to the tank makes this task much simpler. Just cable-tie the filler pump tube to the hold-open strap and it will be right there, whenever you open the door.





Waste Water Tank Drain Pipe System Jim Wartzok @ 541-324-1734

This telescoping drain pipe system saves space and time in connecting to sewer hookups. The pipe will extend from 2' → 8' / 3' → 12' / 4' → 16' depending on which length you prefer. An extension pipe can also be added.

The beauty of this system is that you no longer have to wrestle a live sewer hose and the slope from your connection to the sewer drain is already established.

If you would like to learn more about it here's a link to a newspaper article published about the inventor, who by the way is a magician with a deck of cards.

[Lizcon RV Disposal System](#)

[E-Z Hose Carrier](#)

I still carry a regular Camco Rhino Sewer hose kit in the event that I need to cover more distance or if the telescoping drain pipe system is obstructed from any direct connection. The hose carrier pictured enables me to carry the hose without taking up any valuable storage space.



Sofa Compartment Hold-Open Latch

Ever find yourself holding the storage compartment behind the sofa open with your head to keep your hands free while you try to remove or store something? This is one of those minor annoyances that led me to decide there just has to be a better way.

This hold-open latch automatically springs into place when the storage compartment lid is lifted. All you need is to cut a piece of wood to the proper length and then attach it to the lid with a simple hinge and a compression spring inserted in between. It cost less than \$5.00 in parts and saves far more in eliminating this needless aggravation.



[Miller's Amazing Magic Table](#)

While it's definitely a stretch to call this table a coach modification, it is so absolutely useful that I was compelled to share it with you. My wife really does not like how much room the original issued coffee occupies, so she was happier with it removed from our coach. I liked having a coffee table, but I liked having a happy wife more, so I removed it from our coach. We found this table at one of the exhibitor booths in Redmond. My wife and I use it to replace both the coffee table and the end table. Now she's happy and I'm happy too. The table can also be raised to our dining table height, which provides more space for guests, servings and dinnerware.



My Personal Favorite Modification

Doug & Mary Barr replaced their original issue TV with a flat screen HDTV, replete with a custom oak trim. The HDTV trim is hinged at the top so that the entire panel swings open to reveal storage space for DVDs behind. I'm a major TV junkie, so this really captured my interest. Since my wife and I became fast friends with Doug & Mary, I will respect their privacy and not disclose their contact information. Otherwise, they would just be completely SOL 😊